

**14th ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
On  
'ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL REFORMS'**

**Organised by**  
Karnataka Election Watch  
(KEW)  
&  
Association for Democratic Reforms  
(ADR)

**Venue**  
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**Date**  
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## SELECT PRESS COVERAGE

# You may have to link Aadhaar with voter ID

Chief Election Commissioner says he is waiting for the apex court approval

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To avoid bogus and proxy voting, the Election Commission on Saturday said that it would soon resume linking of voter ID cards with biometric Aadhaar cards after obtaining permission from the Supreme Court. Chief Election Commissioner Om Prakash Rawat, clarified that ECI has already linked 32 crore voters' ID card with Aadhaar numbers and the rest will be linked soon.

Interacting with the media on the sidelines of a national seminar organised by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Karnataka Election Watch at Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru (IIM-B) Rawat said, "As soon as we get a clearance from the SC, all the 87-90 crore voters ID will be linked with Aadhaar numbers." When questioned how long would it take to complete the process, Rawat replied, "The matter is pending before the Supreme Court and the moment SC gives its nod we will resume. We have already linked 32 crore voters with their Aadhaar numbers."

Amid the hullaballoo over tampering of EVMs, electoral reform activists also complained about EVMs failing to protect the identity of voters in a booth which often results in either pre-poll intimidation or post-poll reprisal. Though the Election Commission has resolved the concern by coming up with 'Totaliser' devices, political parties have opposed the move.

Questioned whether the EC would experiment with 'Totalisers' in Karnataka polls, Rawat again pointed his fingers at



State Election Commissioner Sarjoo Kumar with Om Prakash Rawat

the apex court and said, "We will file an affidavit before the Supreme Court on Monday about usage of totalisers and subject to SC ruling we will decide further." Election Commission sources told BM that totaliser machines are a mechanism to hide individual booth-wise voting patterns so that nobody gets to know what people have voted for.

"As many as 14 EVMs can be linked together using the totaliser and nobody gets to know which booth has voted for

whom and thereby protecting the voters' interest. We had tested it way back in 2008 and subsequently demonstrated to political parties also," Rawat said. During pre-EVMs era ballot papers from booths were mixed up with other booths to ensure secrecy. However with EVMs, it is easy to find out how people voted at a particular polling station.

Activists alleged that there have been lot of discrepancies in affidavits filed by candidates and Election Commission has been silent on such issues. To this Rawat said, "Our duty starts from the day of

### CEO 'SILENCES' CONGRESS SPOKESMAN

Taking part in a panel discussion on "Muscle and Money Power: Impact on Elections", Congress spokesperson and advocate Urjish Kalappa chose to divert from the topic and express his party's reservations on functioning of EVMs. Urging the CEO to take up blazing electoral reforms, Kalappa suggested let EVMs be the first on the list.

Prakash Rawat was quick enough to silence Kalappa and directed him to download "VM Status Paper" put up on ECI website which has the answer for all his queries. Kalappa said about 50 per cent of sitting MLAs from his party (Congress) in Karnataka are under pressure from the use of EVMs.

of issuing notification to announcement of results. We will carry out so many activities that there is hardly any time for the EC to scrutinise every single affidavit. If any individual or organisation finds discrepancies, they can file complaints with the enforcing authorities." Though the ECI is considering having representation from civil society as observers during polls, it is worried that the move may pave way for political infiltration jeopardising the democracy.

# One-third of voters believe caste and religion matter

37% Consider Religion, 36% Caste: Survey

Times News Network

Bengaluru: A survey conducted by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Delhi on voter perception shows that despite a general thumbs up for chief minister Siddaramaiah's populist schemes, the 2018 elections may well be decided on the caste and religion of candidates.

### DANCE OF DEMOCRACY

As per the report, 55% of the people sampled consider religion an important factor while 48% believe the caste of candidates will not be the vote. The report says 52% considered a CM aspirant as the deciding factor while 77% of respondents believed it would be the party they belonged to. While the report may anger web for BJP

### MLA'S GIFT: MIXIES FOR WOMEN



POLL TOP: Women on Saturday queue up to get mixies provided by Chikaballapura Congress MLA D Sudhakar as part of his ground campaign. Some time ago, a similar drawing competition was held for women in the constituency during which all the participants were provided prizes.

Delhi: A survey conducted by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Delhi on voter perception shows that despite a general thumbs up for chief minister Siddaramaiah's populist schemes, the 2018 elections may well be decided on the caste and religion of candidates. While 56% of respondents said they were unhappy with the Indian Caste system, 38% said they were not willing to be in office. Only 51% welcomed it. For Shakti Bhagya scheme, in

which minority community members are provided financial assistance, 45% of those surveyed said they were not happy with it. Another 45% said they didn't even use it. The government was given good feedback by respondents with regard to providing better roads and environment protection schemes. Both schemes received a score of 4.5 out of 5. The worst score was given to the region for being unable to eliminate corruption and providing better employment opportunities. The respondents gave scores of 4.47 and 4.70 respectively.

Methodology: ADR and DAKSH survey sampled 33,344 people from 224 constituencies between December 2017 and January 2018. The maximum income group was between Rs 12,000 and Rs 20,000 per annum, while the minimum number of participants were from below Rs 10 lakh. Income group with 22% of the sample also. The survey took the maximum opinion between the age group of 22 years and 60 years. While 67.4% of those sampled were men, 32.6% were women.

# Political discourse ignores real issues of people: survey

BENGALURU: Political discourse in the state may be focused on matters like corruption and law and order, but people picked water, electricity, schools and roads as major concerns among 25 issues, while terrorism was of least concern, as per a statewide survey.

Interestingly, corruption, communalism and rising crimes, the three issues which have occupied both BJP and Congress leaders during their campaign over the last two months, were among the six issues of least concern in both urban and rural areas.

In fact, corruption is one of the issues in which the government shows worst performance. On a scale of 1 to 10 points, public facilities got 6.79 followed by corruption eradication (6.77) and job training (6.4).

The Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) and DAKSH released the report, based on their survey of 33,344 people across 224 constituencies. A majority of the respondents are aged between 31 and 60 years and 70% have an annual income ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 25,000.

"The survey is aimed at bringing out real issues, considering that elections are an opportunity to influence governance. It shows that parties are not speaking about problems affecting the people," said Trilochan Sastri of ADR and IIM(B) professor, who conceptualised the survey and supervised the research group.

The priority of the people for water and electricity is de-



Chief Election Commissioner O P Rawat (third from left) at the release of the survey report at a function held at the IIM-B on Saturday. (From left) Founder member of Association for Democratic Reforms, Ajit Ranade, Karnataka's Chief Electoral Officer Sanjiv Kumar and ADR founder member Trilochan Sastri were also present. DH Photo

### What people see when they vote



SOURCE: ADR SURVEY

plete the fact that the Congress government scores its best in these issues. People have given thumbs up from 79% of the respondents, followed by Anna Bhagya (54%) and Cyde Bhagya (63%). For Krishna Bhagya, 56% said they were happy, whereas 25% were not.

While it may take time for electoral discourse to focus purely on issues related to governance, we hope that such surveys continue to create a dialogue for further discussion, Sastri said. DH News Service

(Compiled by L1 Bangalore 2018, Dharmendra)

## ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಸ್ಥಿತಿಗತಿ ಕಾಣಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಸಲಹೆ ನೀಡುವ ಬ್ಯಾಂಕ್ ವರದಿಗಳನ್ನು ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಸ್ಥಿತಿಗತಿ ಕಾಣಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಸಲಹೆ ನೀಡುವ ಬ್ಯಾಂಕ್ ವರದಿಗಳನ್ನು ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಸ್ಥಿತಿಗತಿ ಕಾಣಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಸಲಹೆ ನೀಡುವ ಬ್ಯಾಂಕ್ ವರದಿಗಳನ್ನು

## ಶೀಘ್ರವೇ ಎಪಿಕ್ ಆಧಾರ್ ಜೋಡಣೆ

## ಸಮಾವೇಶದಲ್ಲಿ ಚುನಾವಣಾ ಮುಖ್ಯ ಅಯುಕ್ತ ಬಿ ಪಿ ರಾವ್ ಹೇಳಿಕೆ

ಬಿ ಪಿ ರಾವ್ ಅವರ ಮಾತು: ಶೀಘ್ರವೇ ಎಪಿಕ್ ಆಧಾರ್ ಜೋಡಣೆ. ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಸ್ಥಿತಿಗತಿ ಕಾಣಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಸಲಹೆ ನೀಡುವ ಬ್ಯಾಂಕ್ ವರದಿಗಳನ್ನು ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಸ್ಥಿತಿಗತಿ ಕಾಣಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಸಲಹೆ ನೀಡುವ ಬ್ಯಾಂಕ್ ವರದಿಗಳನ್ನು ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಸ್ಥಿತಿಗತಿ ಕಾಣಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಸಲಹೆ ನೀಡುವ ಬ್ಯಾಂಕ್ ವರದಿಗಳನ್ನು



ಮುಖ್ಯಾಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳ ಸಭೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಬಿ ಪಿ ರಾವ್ ಅವರ ಮಾತು.

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## Acknowledgement

We take this opportunity to thank Prof Trilochan Sastry, Shri Harish Narasappa, Dr Balasubramanian Sivakumar and the entire team of Karnataka Election Watch (KEW) for making the 14<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Electoral and Political Reforms, a grand success. We express special thanks and gratitude to Prof G Raghuram, Director Indian Institute of Management -Bangalore (IIM-B), for extending all possible support for the conduct of the conference.

We are profusely thankful to **Shri Om Prakash Rawat, Chief Election Commissioner**, Election Commission of India (ECI), for his presence and inputs at the Conference and extend our gratitude to the ECI for its constant support to our efforts. We would also like to thank all the other dignitaries, whose participation added impetus and synergy to our work.

The Conference would not have been a possibility without the eminent speakers and participants; we thank them for their participation and valuable inputs. Special thanks to the media and the journalists who have always been supportive of our work and have been one of the important mediums to reach out to the masses.

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) would like to thank participants of various political parties, the ECI, NGOs and others who dispassionately reviewed our past efforts on electoral and political reforms and came forward with thought-provoking suggestions to remedy prevailing issues.

Last but not the least, we are deeply grateful to all our State Election Watch coordinators and partners for their participation and support in reaching out to citizens across the country. We conclude by thanking the Management and Administrative staff of Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, for their consistent support before and during the event.



## Executive Summary

The Annual National Conference was held in Bangalore with the primary focus on Electoral and Political reforms. The Conference was held with the aim of bringing together and synergizing efforts towards strengthening democracy in our country.

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), **Shri Om Prakash Rawat**, inaugurated the Conference. Representatives of the National Election Watch (NEW) from each state chapter, members of political parties, government institutions and media were present to deliberate on issues related to electoral and political reforms in the country. The National Conference was an opportunity for us to add impetus and synergy to our work by bringing together all stakeholders. Their participation and inputs were instrumental in making the Conference a success.

Topics of discussion during the National Conference ranged from *‘Muscle and Money Power: Impact on Elections,’ ‘Legal Advocacy: A Tool for Electoral Reforms,’ ‘Political Reforms and the Fourth Estate,’ to ‘Money Power and Elections – Success Stories from the Exceptions,’ and ‘Information & Communication Technology for Better Governance’ and ‘Role of Youth & Voter Awareness: Advocacy by State Coordinators’*. These discussions were enriched by the participation of eminent people including the Chief Election Commissioner **Shri Om Prakash Rawat**, representatives of political parties, academicians, civil society and the media.

At the end of the Conference, the house unanimously came up with recommendations addressing issues ailing our political and electoral system.

## 14<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE

On

### 'ELECTORAL & POLITICAL REFORMS'

Organized by Karnataka Election Watch (KEW) & Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)

**Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2018

**Venue:** Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bangalore

### AGENDA

10<sup>th</sup> March, 2018 - Auditorium

9:00 – 10:00	<b>Registration</b>
10:00 – 10:30	<p><b>Inauguration:</b> Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head of ADR)</p> <p><b>National Anthem and Lamp lighting</b></p> <p><b>Chief Guest:</b> Shri Om Prakash Rawat (Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India)</p> <p><b>Welcome Address:</b> Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR), Prof G Raghuram (Director, IIM-Bangalore)</p>
10:30 – 11:00	<p><b>Keynote Address by Shri Om Prakash Rawat, Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson:</b> Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)</p> <p><b>Book release:</b> Karnataka Voter Survey, 2018, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Election Watch Report, 2017</p>
11:00 – 11:45	<p><b>Muscle and Money Power: Impact on Elections</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson:</b> Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)</p> <p><b>Panelists:</b> Shri Brijesh Kalappa (Spokesperson, INC), Shri G N Nagaraj (State Secretary, CPI(M)), Shri Mahima J Patel (State President, JD(U)), Shri Yashwant Deshmukh (Founder, C-Voter), Shri Tanveer Ahmed (National Spokesperson, JDS)</p>
11:45 – 12:00	Open Discussion
12:00 – 12:15	<b>Tea Break</b>
12:15 – 13:00	<p><b>Legal Advocacy: A Tool for Electoral Reforms</b></p> <p><b>Chairperson:</b> Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)</p> <p><b>Panelists:</b> Shri S N Shukla (General Secretary, Lok Prahari), Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW)</p>



13:00 – 13:30	<b>Open Discussion</b>
13:30 – 14:30	<b>Lunch</b>
14:30 – 15:15	<b>Political Reforms and the Fourth Estate</b> <b>Chairperson:</b> Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee of ADR) <b>Panelists:</b> Ms C G Manjula (Views Editor – Prajavani), Shri Ramakrishna Upadhya (Senior Journalist & Author), Shri Manoj Mitta (Sr. Independent Journalist & Author)
15:15 – 15:45	<b>Open discussion</b>
15:45 – 16:30	<b>Money Power and Elections – Success Stories from the Exceptions</b>  <b>Chairperson:</b> Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR) <b>Panelists:</b> Shri Abhay Kumar (Social Activist), Ms Ambamma (Sarpanch, Davaragudi Gram Panchayat, Karnataka), Ms Mallamma (Sarpanch, Gram Panchayat, Raichur District, Karnataka), Ms Agatha Bhengra (Mukhiya, Torpa, Jharkhand)
16:30 – 17:00	<b>Open discussion</b>
17:00 – 17:10	<b>Vote of Thanks:</b> Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW)
20:00 onwards	<b>Dinner</b>

**11<sup>th</sup> March, 2018**

09:30 – 10:00	<b>Registration</b>
10:00 – 11:00	<b>Information &amp; Communication Technology for Better Governance</b> <b>Chairperson:</b> Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee – ADR) <b>Panelists:</b> Shri Jaskirat Singh (Trustee – ADR, Founder – CRAMAT), Ms Anita Gurumurthy (Executive Director – IT for Change), Ms Manasa Venkataraman (Research Associate, Takshashila Institution), Shri Vinay K Sreenivasa (Alternative Law Forum)
11:00 – 11:30	<b>Open Discussion</b>
11:30 – 11:45	<b>Tea</b>
11:45 – 12:45	<b>Role of Youth &amp; Voter Awareness : Advocacy by State Coordinators</b>  <b>Chairperson:</b> Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head of ADR) <b>Panelists:</b> Dr O P Bhuraita (HP EW), Ms Pankti Jog (Gujarat EW), Shri Sanjay Singh (UP EW), Shri Ranjan Mohanty (Odisha EW)
12:45 – 13:00	<b>Open Discussion</b>

13:00 – 13:15	<b>Resolutions and ‘Next Steps for NEW’</b>  <b>Chairpersons:</b> Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee of ADR), Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW)
13:15 onwards	<b>Lunch &amp; Dispersal</b>

### Documents Distributed to the Delegates

- **Karnataka Voter Survey, 2018 book.**
- **Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assembly Elections 2017 Election Watch Report.**
- **Analysis of Votes Polled for NOTA in Lok Sabha, State Assemblies and Municipal Corporation Elections.**
- **Background notes on Panel Discussion themes: ‘Muscle and Money Power: Impact on Elections,’ ‘Legal Advocacy: A Tool For Electoral Reforms,’ ‘Political Reforms And The Fourth Estate,’ and ‘Information & Communication Technology For Better Governance’.**

The above documents can be found at [www.adrindia.org](http://www.adrindia.org).

## Minutes of the Sessions

Day – 1 (10<sup>th</sup> March,'18)

### Inauguration & Welcome Address



*(From Left to Right) Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW), Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee, ADR), Shri Sanjiv Kumar (Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka), Shri Om Prakash Rawat (CEC, Election Commission of India), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee, ADR), Prof G Raghuram (Director, IIM Bangalore) and Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member and Trustee, ADR)*

#### **Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head of ADR)**

Gen Verma welcomed the **Chief Guest of the event, Shri Om Prakash Rawat (Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India)**, Prof G Raghuram (Director, IIM-B), and all other participants to the **14th Annual National Conference on Political & Electoral Reforms** on behalf of ADR & Karnataka Election Watch. He invited everyone to actively participate in the proceedings over two days to make it a productive affair with some viable recommendations emerging after the discussions. After the National Anthem, he invited Shri Rawat and Prof Raghuram for the lamp lighting ceremony to mark the beginning of the two-day National Conference.



### **Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustee, ADR)**

Prof Sastry welcomed everyone and spoke about the mission that ADR (being non-political and non-partisan) has set out for itself and the values on which it works. One mission is to demand transparency and accountability from the Indian political system, which leads to good governance and help voters to make an informed choice about candidates before they vote. Another mission is to push for basic structural changes, which has so far resulted in 12 major judgements from the Supreme Court on the issues of electoral and political reforms. The most well-known judgement is the one, which requires candidates to declare their assets and criminal records and make it public.

For the past two decades, ADR has been working for corruption-free elections, which is yet to be achieved and one of the criticisms that ADR faces is that things are the same and nothing has changed over the years. He talked about the issue of criminalization of politics, Black Money, high elections expenditure etc. which continue to be major problem areas in our electoral/political system. He said that the candidates, who spend a lot of money in elections, focus largely on recouping that investment and providing good governance is not on their priority list thus, there is a clear link between huge election expenditure and lack of good governance. In this atmosphere of despair and cynicism, some good things are happening too. For example:-

1. There is a Sangathan in Karnataka, which had spent less than a thousand rupees for contesting the elections and won 320 panchayat seats and captured 15 panchayats with a majority. The governance in those villages has improved as the Government money is reaching to the right people who are using it effectively.
2. A well-known organization in Bundelkhand campaigned against a candidate who was openly distributing money and liquor resulting in the candidate losing the election. A request has been put forward to the Election Commission that if there is an evidence of such activities even in one or two constituencies, it is better to consider countermanding the elections.

**Prof G Raghuram (Director, IIM-Bangalore)**

Prof Raghuram welcomed all on behalf of IIM Bangalore. He reminisced the time when Prof Sastry shared with him the idea of better governance by ensuring that the information about candidates' credentials is available in the public domain easily. He said, "ADR is doing the good work of processing, analyzing and disseminating the information to help voters make an informed choice."

**Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH, and Coordinator, KEW)**

Shri Narasappa welcomed all and hoped that the deliberations would help develop some innovative ideas towards achieving electoral and political reforms. He explained how, since its formation, ADR and NEW's focus has been to put the citizens at the center of the electoral politics of this country. He mentioned that ADR has been focusing on transparency and clean elections, which would lead to good governance.

To ensure that the citizens continue to remain the focus of elections, and not just a mere participant or an observer, ADR and NEW has been working on eliciting the issues that are relevant to voters. ADR provides crucial information to the people, which is necessary to make the right choice during the elections.

He said that they were going to release various reports on behalf of Karnataka Election Watch (KEW), first one being a **Voters Perception Survey, 2018**, conducted jointly by Daksh and ADR. The purpose of this survey was to elicit issues that are important to voters across 224 Assembly Constituencies in Karnataka. It was in Karnataka that the voters' perception survey was conceptualized and implemented for the first time in 2008. Prior to the 2014 General Elections, India's largest political survey on voters' perception was conducted across 534 Parliamentary Constituencies comprising 2.65 lacs respondents. The other two reports to be released were pertaining to Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assembly Elections 2017.





**Address by Shri Om Prakash Rawat,  
Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India  
*Chairperson – Dr Ajit Ranade***



**Dr Ajit Ranade (Founder member and Trustee, ADR)**

Dr Ranade welcomed the Chief Guest and keynote speaker of the **14<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference, Shri Om Prakash Rawat, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)**. Introducing Shri Rawat to the eminent guests present there, Dr Ranade thanked the Election Commission of India (ECI) for its proactive support to ADR's work since its inception. He also welcomed the representatives of different State Election Watches, who came all the way to Bangalore to participate in the event, and

appreciated their constant efforts in the direction of decriminalization of Indian politics and betterment of democracy. He introduced **Shri Rawat** to the audience and requested him to deliver the keynote address.

**Shri Om Prakash Rawat (Text of the Speech)**

Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head of ADR), Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member and Trustees, ADR), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder member and Trustees, ADR), Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW), Prof G Raghuram (Director IIM-B), learned participants, friends from media and Ladies & Gentlemen, it gives me immense pleasure to be here with you all. We have today gathered here to brainstorm and seek insights into various aspects, so as to bring about necessary improvements in our electoral systems, processes and governance to strengthen our Democracy.



Let me set the context for such an important exercise at the outset. Two centuries ago only one percent of people lived in democracies globally and even there women and working class men were denied the vote, now two thirds of the people live in democracies and even authoritarian states are freer than they were, phenomenal progress indeed. As a consequence, quality of life has considerably

improved for a large number of people worldwide. Health indicators of world population are improving and poverty levels are declining globally. In Indian Context, democracy has effectively worked for people and one of the singular achievement 70 years after independence has been holding of free and fair elections.

The credit goes to our political leadership, parties, institutions, Civil Society, election managers and above all the real sovereign, the people of India. But new challenges are emerging and our efforts to meet them appear to be falling short; requiring all of us to sit down, brainstorm and innovate to put in place a better and more effective system to squarely meet the challenges of the day and be prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

The Election Commission, drawing from its experience in the conduct of elections, proactively strives to improve and reform the electoral system. While the management aspects of election process can be improved and fine-tuned by the Commission itself, there would be several aspects that need changes in the statutes. The Commission has made several recommendations for amendments in the Act and the Rules, by way of reform proposals made from time to time, some of which have been accepted by the government at different points of time. The important proposals relate to areas ranging from decriminalization of politics, to reforms relating to political parties, election expenditure regulation and election management issues. Several of these issues have gained heightened relevance in the present day context.

A few of the important proposals, are highlighted here. Many of these have already attracted public interest and generated debates, notably in conferences of ADR itself.

## **A. DECRIMINALIZATION OF POLITICS**

### **1. Disqualification upon charge-sheeting in cognizable offences**

1.1. The Supreme Court has observed that (Krishnamoorthy vs. Sivakumar & Ors, 2015), concealment or suppression of his criminal antecedents by a candidate, particularly of serious offences, amount to interference with the free exercise of voters' right to vote as it prevents the voter from making an informed choice, and hence, it amounts to 'undue influence'.

1.2. The Commission has proposed that persons charged with serious offences should be debarred from contesting in the elections at the stage when the charges are framed by the competent court provided the offence is punishable by imprisonment of at least 5 years, and the case is filed at least 6 months prior to the election in question. The Law Commission has also taken note of the menace of criminalization of politics and they have suggested a middle- path that disqualification may be triggered after one year from the stage of framing of charges. Either way, considering the long time taken in conviction, especially of those with political clout, there is a felt need to consider disqualification even prior to the stage of conviction, not for petty offences, but for serious offences.

The Supreme Court has directed that cases of legislators should be decided in one year. Even this will help as a Member facing serious charges will not continue indefinitely during pendency of the case.

## **2. Making Bribery a Cognizable Offence and Countermanding Elections on Ground of Bribery**

2.1 Incidents of bribery in elections have been on the rise; however, bribery is still a non-cognizable offence, attracting minimal punishment when compared to the seriousness of the offence in democratic elections. Accordingly, the Commission has recommended that bribery be made a cognizable offence with a minimum of 2 years imprisonment for effective deterrence.

2.2 In cases following large-scale instances of bribing of electors by candidates and workers of political parties, the Commission, has used its plenary powers under Article 324 to cancel the election. This was recently done in the case of the RK Nagar bye-election last year. In the Commission's view, there should be a provision in the Representation of the People Act, 1951 enabling the Commission to take appropriate action including countermanding of election in the event of widespread incidents of bribery of electors in a constituency, if in the opinion of the Commission such incidents are likely to vitiate the election.



## **B. REFORMS RELATING TO POLITICAL PARTIES**

### **3. Deregistration of Political Parties**

3.1 The Election Commission of India should be authorized to issue necessary orders regulating registration and de-registration of political parties. Many political parties obtain registration, but never contest an election, existing only on paper, perhaps with an eye on availing the income tax exemption afforded to parties.

3.2 Furthermore, the Commission has also proposed that Income Tax exemption should be available only to political parties that contest elections and win seat(s) in the Parliament or Legislative Assemblies. This was proposed in order to prevent proliferation of non-serious parties who may seek registration only to avail income tax benefits.

## **4. Compulsory Maintenance of Accounts by Political Parties and Standardized Auditing Guidelines**

### **4.1. The Commission recommends:**

- i. Parties should be statutorily required to submit to the Election Commission, its audited accounts,
- ii. These accounts will be made publicly available for inspection.
- iii. Furthermore, the accounts should be audited by a panel of such accountants maintained for the purpose by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

4.2. Since there is no legislation, regulation, or rule, which prescribes standard financial accounting and reporting framework for financial statements of political parties in India, the Commission requested the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India to assist in this regard. The Institute made certain recommendations in February 2010 under its "Guidance Note on Accounting & Auditing of Political Parties" to the Election Commission for improving the system of accounting followed by political parties in India. The Election Commission's Transparency Guidelines notified in August 2014, require political parties to conform to the Guidance Note released by the ICAI, however it is desirable that this requirement be legislated with appropriate penal consequences for non-compliance.

## 5. Ceiling on Campaign Expenditure by Political Parties

5.1. The Commission has proposed that there should be a limit on the ceiling of election expenditure by political parties in Assembly and Parliamentary elections, in order to maintain a level playing field and control the use of money power in elections. This ceiling should not exceed the expenditure ceiling specified for individual candidates, multiplied by the number of candidates of that party, contesting elections. Furthermore, the Commission has also suggested that the amount of financial assistance given by a political party to any of its candidates should not exceed the limit prescribed under Section 77(3) of the RP Act, 1951.

## C. ELECTORAL BONDS

Government took an initiative to impact political funding by bringing in the concept of Electoral bond through Finance Bill presented last year. Commission considered the provisions and took action as under.

6. The Commission has written to the Govt. drawing attention to amendment to section 29C of the Representation of People Act, 1951 carried out vide the Finance Act, 2016 (excluding electoral bonds from the requirement of reporting) which will impact the transparency of political finance.

6.1. Furthermore, the Commission had also recommended that the RP Act, 1951 should be amended to reduce the limit of anonymous donations to Rs 2000 in order to bring this in consonance with the Income Tax Act, 1961 which has been amended to prohibit the receipt of donations exceeding Rs. 2,000 in cash.

6.2. The Commission also recommended to reconsider the amendments introduced in the Companies Act omitting the limit of 7.5% of companies' average net profits in the preceding three financial years. The Commission recommended that a provision should be made in the Companies Act, to declare party-wise contributions made by companies in the profit and loss account, in order to bring about transparency in the fundraising of political parties.

6.3. This scheme has been notified on 02.01.2018 and the first tranche of electoral bonds are under issue w.e.f 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2018.

6.4. Commission would review the working of the scheme thereafter and furnish further suggestions to the Government.

#### **D. ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND ADVERTISEMENTS**

##### **7. Ban on Government Sponsored Advertisements before Elections**

7.1. Central and State Governments embarking often undertake 'election advertising' in the guise of providing information to the public, shortly before elections, with a view to influencing voting decisions. Advertisements highlighting achievement of the government are incurred from the public exchequer and have the effect of influencing the electorate in an upcoming election.

7.2. Item VII, clause vii in the Model Code of Conduct prohibits issue of advertisements at the cost of the public exchequer in newspapers and other media. Use of official media during the election period for coverage of the government's achievements, which have the effect of furthering the prospects of the ruling party, is also prohibited by item VII. However, the Model Code comes into effect only from the date the Commission announces the election, while advertisements are released much prior to the announcement of elections.

7.3. The Commission has proposed that advertisements of achievements of the governments, either Central or State, should be prohibited for a period of six months prior to the date of expiry of the term of the House.

7.4. Where unavoidable, exception could be carved out for educating the general public on matters of public health etc. in exigent circumstances. However, there should not be display of political personalities in the said advertisements and the practice of putting up banners and hoardings in public places, depicting achievements of governments should be banned. Furthermore, there should be specific provisions that a name or symbol of any political party or photograph of any of the leaders of the party should not appear on such hoardings/banners. Such steps would help in ensuring that the ruling party or candidate does not get an undue advantage over another in the spirit of free and fair election.



## 8. Amendment to Section 126

8.1. The Commission has proposed that that print media be brought within the ambit of section 126 of the RP Act, which prohibits any electioneering activities by way of public meetings, public performance, processions, advertisements through cinematograph, television or similar apparatus during the period of 48 hours before the conclusion of poll. The exclusion of print media is a lacuna in the law which must be addressed. The Commission is also considering ways in which all media may be regulated equally during the last 48 hours before close of poll, in order to preserve an atmosphere of neutrality in which electors can reflect before exercising their franchise.

## 9. Paid News

9.1. The Commission is of the view that 'paid news' vitiates free and fair elections and proposes that the publishing and abetting the publishing of 'paid news' furthering the election prospects of any candidate or prejudicially affecting the prospects of a candidate, should be an electoral offence under Chapter III Part VII of The Representation of the People Act, 1951 with exemplary punishment of a minimum of two years imprisonment.

9.2. Free and fair elections are the foundation of any democracy; this can only be achieved when the media educates and informs the voting public about political parties and candidates to an election, in a responsible manner. According to a study conducted by the Commission, during the assembly elections held in the period 2011-2013 there have been 1987 cases where a notice for paid news was issued to the candidates and 1727 cases where the practice of paid news were confirmed by the District/State Level Committees appointed for the purpose. There could be many more undetected cases.

**10. To conclude,** I would like to request all the learned participants gathered here to contribute to their fullest in the discussions so as to bring out comprehensive and workable proposals to further improve our elections and governance at large. I would like to thank ADR and Karnataka Election Watch to have given me this opportunity to interact with you.

### Open session

**Q1.** Is State Funding of elections the answer to eliminate use of money power in an election?

**Shri Harish**

**Ans. The CEC said** that this issue has never been considered in India. He gave the example of US, where it was started in a few states. Initially it showed some promise but later on, after the Supreme Court ruling that political funding is also a way of expression and is protected by the law as a freedom of expression, nobody questioned it. As the concept of state funding was fizzling out there, hence it was not considered here. Unless we find ways to check/control misuse/abuse of money power in elections, even if we introduce state funding other forces will continue to abuse it.

**Q2.** During elections vote buying is a common phenomenon, voters are bribed to vote for particular candidates. Earlier, voters took money but cast their vote for candidate of their choice but now they are afraid as unlike earlier practice of mixing up votes which insulated the voter from identification, now there is segregated information available of who is voting to whom at the booth level. This information is exploited by the candidates to threaten voters. Can this be avoided or can something be done about it? **(Dr R Balasubramaniam, KEW)**

**Ans. The CEC expressed** his concern and informed the audience that the Hon'ble Supreme Court was hearing this petition currently and the ECI will be submitting its affidavit on 12<sup>th</sup> March. The ECI had asked for devising a machine called totaliser, which would mix 14 EVMs together and take out their result together, without making it known polling station wise. He further added that we should wait for Supreme Court's ruling. On this, **Prof Chhokar** intervened to inform the audience that the GOI in its affidavit to the Supreme Court has opposed the idea of the totaliser. While the ECI finds the totaliser useful, the GOI does not.

**Q3.** Motivated and upright officers are posted as Expenditure Observers during elections but are not able to work due to complete lack of logistical support because there is cartelisation amongst officers subordinate to them e.g. a driver might not cooperate if there is news regarding money power being used and the officer wants to go for inspection in the evening. Does this require logistical revamp?

**Dr Amitha AJ (Deputy Accountant General - SS & LBA)**

**Ans. The CEC regretted** the situation as reported by the lady officer and asked her to take severe action whenever required besides asking her to report the matter to the Election Commission so that orders can be issued in time by the state.

**Q4.** Is there any possibility in the future that some of the recognized civil society representatives could also be included in the list of observers? **Dr Ujjaini Halim (WBEW)**

**Ans. The CEC appreciated** the suggestion but expressed concern regarding how to prevent political infiltration through this route.

## Muscle and Money Power: Impact on Elections

***Chairperson: Prof Trilochan Sastry***



***(From Left to Right)*** Shri Yashwant Deshmukh (Founder, C-Voter), Shri Tanveer Ahmed (National Spokesperson, JDS), Shri Brijesh Kalappa (Spokesperson, INC), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder Member & Trustee, ADR), Shri G N Nagaraj (State Secretary, CPI(M)) and Shri Mahima J Patel (State President, JD(U))



### **Shri Mahima J Patel (State President, JD(U))**

Shri Mahima Patel said that it was possible to conduct free and fair elections, he said in 2004, he did not distribute any money or liquor to win the elections. He added that he had spent only around Rs 25 lacs during that time and people still supported him and he won the elections.

Shri Patel stated that during his tenure as an MLA, his only focus was to do good work thus in 2007 Assembly elections, he won despite not doing any campaigning for the elections. He emphasized that his sole aim was not only to win the elections, but also to ensure conduct of a simple, fair and transparent elections. Shri Patel requested the Chief Election Commissioner to support him in conducting free and fair election in his constituency. He also emphasized that he is committed to spending below the Rs 28 lacs limit or even lesser for the next elections in his constituency.



**Shri G N Nagaraj (State Secretary, CPI(M))**

Shri G N Nagaraj said that the recent amendments made through Finance Act, 2018, 2017 and 2016, all passed as money bills, have opened doors to unlimited political donations, even from foreign companies and thereby legitimizing electoral corruption. He said that these amendments in laws need to be struck down. Unless this is done, money power cannot be controlled.



He specifically mentioned three amendments - first, about the inclusion of the system of electoral bonds in political funding and demanded that this scheme should be completely scrapped. Second, he stated that the recent amendment had removed the previous limit of 7.5 percent of the company's average three-year net profit for political donations as also that a company is no longer required to name the parties to which such contributions are made. Shri Nagaraj told the audience that now the corporate funding will increase manifold as there is no limit to how much the companies can donate. Third, Shri Nagaraj pointed out the amendments made in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 1976 and 2010 can bring a potential abuse by permitting foreign funding and interference in the Indian elections and therefore, these amendments should also be removed and declared unconstitutional.

He said that all these three amendments are opaque and highly regressive. He stated that these amendments will increase the influence of money power manifold and citizens will never be able to know about this free flow of money in elections. Shri Nagaraj also said that corporate funding should be completely banned. He stated that his party CPI (M) does not take any funds from the corporate but has a system of people funding where more than 75% of the funding of the party should be from small donations. He also stated that if their party receives any donation above Rs 10,000, it is reported to the State Committee, which in turn does the background checks of the donor who has donated such sum. He also emphasized on the system of State funding of elections. He said that the corporates who give such huge amount of money to the parties as an investment for their future businesses should instead be made to donate to a State fund. Shri Nagaraj concluded by saying that in order to have clean and fair elections, there should be state funding of elections and a cap on political party funding and expenditure.



**Shri Brijesh Kalappa (Spokesperson, INC)**

Shri Brijesh Kalappa said that Article 324 of the Indian Constitution makes the Election Commission of India a predominant force in conducting and supervising the elections in our country. He said that we should have a system of hackathons for the EVMs. He stated that in the next wave of reforms, it is necessary to see how EVMs are functioning. This will inspire confidence among the larger electorate and the country at large.

Shri Kalappa also requested to the Election Commission of India that in the process of superintending elections under Article 324 of the Indian Constitution, ECI should try to have their own independent intelligence set up in collecting and collating information and also to check any kind of electoral malpractices. He also emphasized that ECI should seriously look into what is happening before and after the Model Code of Conduct is implemented.



**Shri Tanveer Ahmed (National Spokesperson, JDS)**

Shri Tanveer Ahmed began by stating, *"Anyone who is saying that they are winning elections without money and muscle power is definitely lying."* While money is a basic need to contest elections, he felt that it is the duty of the common people to hold the politicians accountable. He said, *"We (common people) know who is a politician, but we certainly do not know what he (politician) is supposed to do for the people."*

He said that he is aware of the fact that India is a developing country and the electoral reforms are evolving every day. The state of the country and electoral reforms is not what it used to be earlier. Agreeing with Shri Kallappa, he said that the EVMs tampering is one of the major issues in the electoral process. He asked the Election Commission of India to clarify the doubts pertaining to EVM tampering, at least on the technical front.

Shri Ahmed said, *"To win an election (in India) without muscle power would be nothing but a miracle."* He believed that the Election Commission of India is doing their duty to bring electoral reforms, but it is the duty of the common people as well to hold the politicians accountable. The country will start evolving the day people will start questioning their elected representatives. He urged the people to ask for electoral reforms and to make politicians accountable. He concluded by stating, *"For me party does not matter, what matters is that a good and clean electoral system must prevail."*



**Shri Yashwant Deshmukh (Founder, C-Voter)**

Shri Deshmukh said that he has monitored, observed and analysed elections in almost 45 countries. He has realized that *"we (Indian citizens) have failed to admire what we have"*. He added that the Election Commission of India and the elections held in India are admired across the world. He felt that people get over-critical.

He rejected the doubts raised around the functionality of EVMs; he says that he rejects such claims. He said that the Indian elections could be divided into 2 phases: Pre-EVM and Post EVM. Before EVMs were introduced, 90% of the results were in a favour of pro-incumbent that means those who were in power kept on winning repeatedly. They could not only abuse the ballot, but could easily abuse the system. The introduction of EVMs brought a remarkable change in the electoral system. Since the day ECI was introduced EVM, in most of the elections, 95% of the results have been anti-incumbent. It implies that those in power are unable to misuse the EVMs in whatsoever capacity.

Further, challenging the claims pertaining to dominance of muscle and money power in Indian politics, he said, *"If the muscle and money power are the only things working in the elections then how come in last 25 years, regardless of state, elections and party affiliations, 50% of sitting MPs/MLAs are losing their elections."* However, he agreed that muscle and money powers exist in the Indian politics, but emphasized on the fact that they are not the only thing that affect the results of an election.

Talking about the muscle power in the Indian electoral system, he said, *"the candidates with muscle power do not win due to the fear factor but they win because, among the citizens, they have an image similar to that of Robin Hood"*. While discussing the reason of the prevalence of muscle and money

power, he said that it is convenient to blame the voters. He added, *“However, we fail to realize that voters will vote for whatever works for them. If a muscleman’s reign helps them to get few things done, makes their life easier then, they will vote for him.”* In the end, he suggested that there should be a substantial public debate and voter education program to decrease the prevalence of muscle and money power in Indian elections.

### **Question-Answers:**

**Q1.** In response to **Shri Kalappa and Shri Ahmed’s** allegation over the EVM tampering, **Shri O P Rawat, CEC,** said, ECI has released an EVM status paper clarifying all the doubts regarding this issue. He added, *“I dread the day when rumor becomes prime movers for reforms.”*

**Ans. Prof Sastry’s** question focusing on the possible remedies to curb muscle and money power, **Shri Ahmed** suggested that the ECI should take stringent actions against those who exceed their election expenditure limit. **Shri Patel** added, suggesting reforms on the lines of state funding of elections and an effective implementation of NOTA. He said that in a constituency, if NOTA secures highest votes, then there should be fresh elections with new candidates. Further, **Shri Deshmukh** emphasized on the significance of voter education programme as a remedy.



## Legal Advocacy: A Tool for Electoral Reforms

*Chairperson: Prof Jagdeep Chhokar*



*(From Left to Right) Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW), Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member & Trustee, ADR) and Shri S N Shukla (General Secretary, Lok Prahari)*

### Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder Member & Trustee, ADR)

Chairperson Prof Jagdeep Chhokar introduced the panelists Shri SN Shukla (General Secretary, Lok Prahari)



and Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW) to the audience. Elaborating on Shri Shukla's work, Prof Chhokar mentioned two important petitions of Lok Prahari, which resulted in landmark judgements - the **2013 Lily Thomas judgement** on disqualification of Convicted MPs/MLAs, where Lok Prahari was also a petitioner, and the recent judgement of the Supreme Court, which made it **mandatory for the candidates to disclose their sources of the income/assets**.

### Shri S N Shukla (General Secretary, Lok Prahari)

Shri S N Shukla started by quoting Dr Rajendra Prasad, First President of India, "Whatever the Constitution may or may not provide, the welfare of the country will depend upon the way in which the country is administered. That will depend upon the men who administer it". Shri Shukla said, "Dr Prasad meant that

the crux of the problem is the character of the elected representatives. Unless we have elected representatives who are men of character and integrity, we really can't achieve good governance.”

He pointed out that the one-point programme of Lok Prahari for the past 14 years has been to ensure that our elected representatives are men of character and integrity through various electoral reforms. He said, the degeneration in the polity of the country during the last five decades shows how true and prophetic the observations of Dr Prasad were. While the first three General Elections (1952-62) were, by and large, free and fair, over the years our electoral system developed serious maladies of corruption, criminalization, communalization and casteism which gravely vitiate the outcome of the election.

Shri Shukla listed out a number of Committees and Commissions that have examined some of the major challenges and issues affecting our electoral system. The names of the said Committees and Commissions are listed below:

1. The Goswami Committee on Electoral reforms (1990)
2. The Vohra Committee Report on Criminal Politician Nexus.(1993)
3. The Indrajit Gupta Committee on State Funding of Elections (1998)
4. The Law Commission Report (170th) on Reform of on Electoral Laws (1999)
5. The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2001)
6. The ECI – Proposed Electoral reforms (2004)
7. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission Report (2008)
8. Justice J.S. Verma Committee Report on Amendments to Criminal Law (2013)
9. The Law Commission’s 244th Report on Electoral Disqualifications (Feb 2014)
10. The Law Commission’s 255th Report on Electoral Reforms (March 2015)

He firmly believed that these reports are a testimony for the crying need for electoral reforms, which are not only imperative but also an urgent necessity. However, unfortunately the recommendations of these elaborately researched and clearly articulated reports were not followed by requisite administrative/legislative action, required for the enhancement of the quality of Democracy, which has a direct effect on the quality of governance.

He said that significantly, none of the major recommendations of the Election Commission of India and Law Commission has been acted upon by the Central Government. Its track record of inaction on the reports of various Committees and Commissions speaks for itself inviting the following observation in the Law Commission's 255th Report of March 2015, "Unfortunately, our recommendations were not followed by legislative action, required for the enhancement of the quality of Democracy, be reducing the influence of money and media in politics and ensuring free and fair elections". Likewise, the CEC in his Foreword to the ECI's Proposed Electoral Reforms (December 2016) lamented, "Many of the proposals put forth by the ECI have remained unresolved".

He said, "the consultations and deliberations over the decades seem to be an endless process and has not yielded any concrete result, reminding one of the famous words of Shakespeare - 'All sound and fury signifying nothing'". He added, "No wonder that despite all the talks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi about electoral reforms and promise of a taint-free Lok Sabha by 2015, nothing significant has been achieved so far. The gap between the words and actions of the Central Government speaks for itself. The Apex Court had directed the Government of India in 2013 in the case of 'Subramaniam Swamy vs ECI' to provide requisite funds for the implementation of ECI's VVPATs plan in phases till 2017. However, despite 10 reminders from the ECI, the Government did not release the requisite funds for over 3 years after the Supreme Court's directive.

According to him the reason is obvious, as beautifully put by Aradhya Sethia in the article 'For cleaner, fairer elections' in the Hindu dated Feb 2, 2018, "Electoral reforms in the hands of politicians is a classic example of 'a fox guarding the hen house'. While there are many policies that both major parties disagree with each other on, they form a remarkable tag team when it comes to electoral reforms". Consequently, over the last two decades the Supreme Court had to step in to introduce electoral reforms on the PILs filed by Civil Societies. Prominent among these are-

- (i) Provision for Disclosure of Assets and Criminal Antecedents upon a Writ Petition filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (May 2002). (AIR 2002 SC 2112)
- (ii) Striking down of Section 33 B of the RP Act, 1951 upon a Writ Petition filed by People's Union for Civil Liberties, which sought to limit the ambit of operation of the earlier Supreme Court order in the ADR case. (2003). (AIR 2003 SC 2363)

(iii) Upon Writ Petitions filed by Lok Prahari and Lily Thomas, in 2005 the Apex Court struck down Section 8(4) of the RP Act, 1951 which permitted even murder convicts to continue as “Hon’ble” Members of Parliament/State Legislature (July 2013). (AIR 2013 SC 3537).

(iv) In the case of ‘Resurgence India vs ECI’ (AIR 2014 SC 344), it was held that filing of affidavit with blank particulars will render it nugatory as being violative of Section 125A (i) of the RP Act, 1951. (2013)

(v) Again, in ‘People’s Union for Civil Liberties vs Union of India (2013) 10 SCC 1’, the Apex Court ruled that the voters must be given an opportunity to choose None of the Above (NOTA) option, which will indeed compel the political parties to nominate a sound candidate.

(vi) In ‘Krishnamoorthy vs Shivkumar & Others’ (AIR 2015 SC 1921) the Apex court ruled that non-disclosure of criminal antecedents would amount to undue influence and, as such, amounts to corrupt practice and, therefore, the election of such candidate can be declared null and void.

(vii) The recent landmark judgment dated Feb 16, 2018 allowing Lok Prahari’s WP (C) 784/2015 regarding disclosure of sources of income etc. As noted in the article by Aradhya Sethia cited earlier, the said decision “paves a way for future constitutional interventions in India’s party funding regime including the scheme of electoral bonds”, thus, removing opacity in party funding and campaign finance.

Shri Shukla said, “Lok Prahari firmly believe that, since the Executive and the Legislature have been failing the country, top Judiciary is the only hope to push the requisite electoral reforms. During the 14 years of its existence, Lok Prahari has taken a number of legal initiatives to ensure purity of our electoral system. He said nonetheless, in the absence of the requisite political will on the part of the ruling establishments and support from the judiciary even the landmark decisions of the Apex Court obtained through legal advocacy have failed to yield the desired results. Thus, the order dated March 10, 2014 in the case of Public Interest Foundation for disposal of criminal cases against sitting legislators within one year of framing of charges by the Court has not been complied with even till now.

Similarly, due to refusal of the High Court and Supreme Court to intervene, decision in the case of Lily Thomas and Lok Prahari striking down Section 8 (40) of the RP Act, 1951 was frustrated with a state minister in UP merrily completing his term even after being sentenced to 3 years’ imprisonment. MLAs in two cases in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra also continued as Lok Prahari’s WP filed in 2016 to effectuate the said decision has remained unlisted for the last 10 months despite repeated requests for early listing. The Apex Court also refused to take notice of the fact that the Constitution Bench decision in the case of Manoj Narula asking the PM and CMs to consider not to include in their Cabinet persons



chargesheeted for corruption/heinous crimes fell on deaf ears. Such a situation acts as a dampener to the efforts of Civil Society through legal advocacy.

He further added, true to its role Election Commission of India has not only been pushing electoral reforms by constant follow up with the Government, but has also been a great support to civil society in their efforts. The recent Supreme Court decision regarding disclosure of additional information by candidates in their affidavit was greatly facilitated due to unequivocal support from the Election Commission of India and particularly the then Chief Election Commissioner Shri Nasim Zaidi. In other cases also, the Commission's response has generally been positive and encouraging. In fact, with judicial support, the Commission can make greater use of its plenary powers under Article 324, subject of course only to constitutional and statutory provisions, to effect requisite electoral reforms on its own. In such a case, more often than not, the Commission's decision is most likely to be upheld by the Judiciary.

He concluded saying that legal advocacy for electoral reforms needs to be given a whole-hearted support by the public. Civil Society Organizations and media can play a very significant role in mass mobilization to expedite the requisite reforms.

### **Shri Harish Narasappa (Founder, DAKSH and Coordinator, KEW)**

Shri Harish Narasappa started the conversation by sharing the story of ADR's formation in 1999, which was a result of legal advocacy itself. He said, "Legal Advocacy is today a path for bringing about reforms. However, except for a few petitions, which are thought through very well and discussed among various groups before being filed at the right time, most of the other petitions are 'reactionary and adhoc in character'. We need a more considered approach to file a petition; we should use each other's resources to identify the crucial areas of concern where we want to approach the court."



Mr. Narasappa added that it is time to organize ourselves in terms of legal advocacy. He said the responsiveness of the judiciary varies from judge to judge; it also depends on the Chief Justice of the High Court that he is keen or not in accepting the petition.

"First, we can use National Election Watch as a joint platform, where we can discuss about the PILs and jointly decide about the PILs to be filed in the court in the next 4 years. Second, we need to recognize the limitations of legal advocacy. Many times, activists feel that the judges are not listening to them or not

taking them seriously, but judiciary needs to follow a certain process, they can't suo moto bring about too many changes. So we need to expand the legal advocacy beyond just filing for small changes or reforms, He added. "We need to see what Judges can do in PILs - **(a)** Do not file for everything in one go, **(b)** Do not seek everything in one go - It has to be an incremental thing but for initiating incremental changes, we need to be organized with 10-15 years in mind and not one or two years in mind.

## Question & Answers

**Q1.** The sources of income being declared in the affidavit by the candidates are vague, they write agriculturists, self-employed or business. There is a clear disconnect between the income and assets but Income Tax Department is not taking any action. So what was the basic intent of getting the source of income being declared? How can we implement the judgement?

**Ms Deepa Sheshadri, Member, TNEW**

**Ans.** In our prayer in the court, we have said that the MPs and MLAs whose assets have increased disproportionately should be probed by CBDT in accordance with the already existing guidelines of ECI. Such increase should be investigated as it is not being done currently, but this prayer was not accepted by the court, while they had accepted our suggestion for a permanent mechanism to verify the sources of income as well as the assets of the elected candidates. In future this will happen.

**Shri S N Shukla (General Secretary, Lok Prahari)**

**Q2.** Sir, in the North East there are a lot of candidates with criminal records, especially the insurgent people who have come to the politics. Due to Government pardon, their criminal records have not been shown in their affidavits. This is an unfair thing which is happening in the North East, what solution do we have?

**Shri Tasaduk Ariful Hussain, AEW**

**Ans.** The same thing is happening in Uttar Pradesh as well and this problem is not specific to North East anymore. One has to try and find a way around it, I have no answer right now.

**Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)**

**Q3.** Political Parties are people's representative but the candidates who win the elections, work for the party and not the people. How do we have a level playing field for the Independent candidates who do not have their own Political Party? Why cannot ECI give a common symbol to all the Independents?

**Anonymous**

**Ans.** There is a provision for Independents in the Constitution and they are independently given a symbol but collectively all the candidates cannot be given a symbol. They should form a party to get a collective symbol.

**Prof Jagdeep Chhokar (Founder member and Trustee of ADR)**

**Political Reforms and the Fourth Estate**  
***Chairperson – Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan***



**(From Left to Right)** Ms C G Manjula (Views Editor – Prajavani), Shri Ramakrishna Upadhyaya (Senior Journalist & Author), Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee, ADR) and Shri Manoj Mitta (Sr. Independent Journalist & Author)



**Prof Sudarsan Padmanabhan (Trustee, ADR)**

After introducing the distinguished panel members, Prof Padmanabhan said that recommendations of the Election Commission of India (ECI) on the issue of paid news mentions an amendment to the RPA – Chapter 3 of Part 7- which awards two years imprisonment to the offenders found guilty of disseminating paid news. Other measures suggested by ECI were:

- a) Educating the political parties, public and the media on the paid news;
- (b) Proposal for setting up a Media Certification Monitoring Committee

(MCMC) to specifically look into the matters of paid news. Prof Sudarsan specified a few other points that he hoped would be discussed as part of the media session: (a) Research component of the media on the performance, governance, manifesto, perception of work done at the ground level by the political parties and the candidates and the government itself; (b) How bribing of voters can be prevented or reduced.

**Ms C G Manjula (Views Editor – Prajavani)**

Ms Manjula started with a quote of John Milton, the celebrated 17<sup>th</sup> century poet, polemicist, and a civil servant in the Commonwealth of England who said, “Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.” Ms Manjula felt that this quote found resonance in the contemporary world. She said that free press was the most cherished freedoms inherent in the modern society. As the epidemic of fake news has become a global malice, she said that this freedom assumes greater importance these days.



Ms Manjula observed that with increasing commercialization, intense competition has been created in media. In a bid to outdo each other, media houses are not focusing on responsible and serious journalism but openly resorting to sensational and cheap journalism. She agreed that there was, unfortunately, a perception that mainstream media was “paid media” due to corporate and editorial arrangements such as private treaties, which are ruling the media scene these days.

While agreeing to the fact that paid news was a big issue these days, she stressed that the democratic interests of many people were being undermined by the private selfish interests of the powerful few. She was of the opinion that many of the media houses’ main purpose was not to serve democracy but to generate maximum profit for a handful of people.

In the prevailing scenario, Ms Manjula felt that “Political Reforms and the Fourth Estate” theme was very complex. With political parties, playing a central role in the functioning of India’s vibrant and often noisy democracy, she stressed that it was imperative that political parties should be subjected to some sort of regulation or public scrutiny. She said, “*Threats of muscle power and coercion in elections may*



*have reduced over time. But these days, newer challenges have surfaced like money power and influence of the media, including social media.”*

Talking about the money power in elections, she said that some politicians try to corrupt media organizations and pressurize people, due to which paid news are generated which is treated as true by the voters, and they exercise their franchise with that mindset causing an adverse impact on the outcome of the elections. This domino effect, she felt, “.... *really poses a threat to democracy*”.

Ms Manjula re-iterated that news was something that was meant to be conveyed to a larger audience and any paid information cannot be treated as news. She said, “*At present, paid news has become more of an institutionalized affair. Unfortunately, the media is termed as the ‘fourth estate on sale’!*” She said that it is believed that the practice of paid news was no longer limited to smaller or larger regional newspapers but is happening across the news media, with even big newspapers indulging in paid news practice.

Addressing the current challenge of paid news, she said that it was difficult to define what constituted paid news. “*It could be described as quid-pro-quo news, or unfair or camouflaged news or advertising. There should ideally be a demarcation between editorial and advertorial. Prajavani newspaper, which I represent, does this consciously. During previous elections, Prajavani discouraged paid news and put a disclaimer in the advertorial for public knowledge. This is the form of ethical journalism that is expected of all media houses.*”

Talking about election expenditure of political parties, she strongly felt that it has to be fixed at a reasonable level with maximum transparency. She also said that it was common knowledge that money and media power in electoral politics have been on the increase. In this age, opined Ms Manjula, “*when large sections of the media have become propaganda machines, we say that media is manufacturing consent.*”

Quoting Amartya Sen’s words, Ms Manjula said, “*Democracy is integrally linked to public reasoning which involves respect for pluralism and an attitude for tolerance of differences. It also involves an open public discussion of issues of common concern and encourages political commitment and participation of people in public action for the transformation of society*”.

She concluded by stating that one should understand the power of media to partner and create political change. She said that the Supreme Court had told that the free press was to serve the governed and not the governing. These words, Ms Manjula felt, were more relevant in the current scenario and felt that it was most important for the press people to remember to serve the governed and not those who are in power.



### Shri Ramakrishna Upadhyaya (Senior Journalist & Author)

Shri Upadhyaya began by stating that while covering the elections when Shri T N Seshan was the Chief Election Commissioner, he felt that it was a momentous occasion in Indian polity as “... *it was Shri Seshan who brought about a great amount of change in the elections in the country. After his term, whoever was appointed as the CEC, had to follow the system that had been set in place.*” Though there have been allegations about the political appointments of the Election Commissioners who have

gone on to become the Chief Election Commissioners, Shri Upadhyaya felt that once appointed, they have conducted themselves well and that credit goes to the Indian democracy. He mentioned three main issues, which he felt, were the three biggest points as far as the electoral reforms are concerned.

a) According to him, the **first problem** was the non-representative character of the elections. While in principle, anyone could contest elections, winning elections was a different ball game. He felt that it was very difficult for somebody who is not backed by a political party or someone who does not have the money/ muscle power, backing of powerful people from a particular caste/ dynasty to win elections. He stated that the system must change so that a common man, with adequate background and talent, can contest and successfully win elections. The important question and the biggest challenge, according to him was “How do we make them get elected to the office?”

b) The **second problem**, according to him, was the criminalization of elections which has been going on for quite some time. Since the last two decades, there has been a growing trend of criminalization in elections. Shri Upadhyaya noted that the number of MPs with criminal cases had risen from 24% in 2004 to 30% in 2009 and to 34% in 2014! Thus, the percentage is on the rise and shows no signs of declining. One major reform that was brought to control criminalization of

politics, according to him, was to debar the candidates who have had at least 2 years' of conviction. Unfortunately, he felt, even that was being flouted. The Assembly Secretariat has to now issue a notification if a convicted member has to be debarred from contesting elections. There are people who have been convicted but they still continue to be the people's representative! Shri Upadhyaya strongly felt that "... *this is a travesty of truth that is happening in this country*". He felt that the courts have been very favourable in acting on various petitions on electoral and political reforms filed by civil society activists however, he felt that it was not enough to just pick up small issues and go to court but identification of a set of broad issues that need to be taken up in courts was essential so as to find solutions that work.

- c) The **third major problem** that he spoke about was the gross misuse of money power. With no transparency in campaign finance, no one knows how much money the candidates spent despite politicians claiming that the candidates spend more than the limit set by the ECI for election campaigns. He felt that it has to become a norm where the ceiling set by ECI has adhered to else the ceiling held no meaning. He added that there was opacity in the corporate donations which has only been increasing with time and turning out to be a menace. There was an amendment in 1985 to bring about some transparency in corporate funding of political parties whereby companies were allowed to disclose their donations to political parties by granting them income tax exemptions for the contributions made. This was an incentive given to the companies for disclosing political donations. But, he questioned the transparency of corporates or companies which truly disclosed their complete donations details.

The candidates' statement of expenditure was an area that, he felt, needed to be looked into. He strongly felt that the ECI blindly accepts the election expenditure statements submitted by the candidates despite knowing it not to be true. He lamented that there was, unfortunately, no mechanism in the ECI to cross-check the figures submitted by the candidates. Shri Upadhyaya's suggestion was that the ECI should at least take up a few cases for scrutiny, if not 100%, and investigate it thoroughly so that facts are presented to the public within 6 months regarding the authenticity of the expenditure claimed to have been incurred by the candidates. If found to be untrue, he said, the candidate should be immediately disqualified which might be the only way to bring about more transparency and accountability. His opinion was that if we started disqualifying the candidates who have been elected by spending more than the limit that they were supposed to adhere to, it would be a permanent deterrent to those candidates who file false statements.

Talking about paid news, Shri Upadhyaya said that this was something that one cannot avoid. He accepted that media's work has been shameful in the last 10-15 years in terms of paid news. He said, "*Earlier, it used*

*to happen in a very small way where a district correspondent or a taluk correspondent would interview the candidate and give him a little 'puff' story for which he would get remuneration. But, I think, since 2004, the managements have taken over!"* So, the management, he said, now tell the correspondents what to do, whom to interview, whose profile to carry which finally get printed and splashed.

Recommending that a candidate, for want of publicity, can use the media but it has to be identified and announced as advertisement and not news! He quoted a text from the report of the sub-committee of the Press Council of India which defined paid news as "... any news analysis appearing in the electronic or print media for a prize in cash or kind as per consideration". However, he was of the opinion that there has been very little effort to control this menace.

He concluded by stating that despite many organizations which could take up this issue such as the Editorials guild, the Indian Newspaper Society, Indian Broadcasting Federation, Press Council of India, the Election Commission of India, there has been no forward movement in curbing the issue of paid news.

#### **Shri Manoj Mitta (Sr. Independent Journalist & Author)**

Shri Manoj Mitta began by emphasizing the significance of the year 2002 in India. He said that the year 2002 was full of watershed moments. It was the year when the incumbent Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi made his debut in the Indian politics. It was also the year when Association for Democratic Reforms' (ADR) PIL brought a noteworthy change in the Indian electoral system. The verdict for this PIL made it mandatory for all candidates contesting elections to disclose criminal, financial and educational background prior to the polls by filing an affidavit with the Election Commission of India. He further highlighted the contribution of ADR since Gujarat Assembly Elections in 2002 where it provided electorate a detailed analysis of the backgrounds of candidates contesting elections in order to help the electorate make an informed choice during polls.



Addressing the topic of discussion, he said that a lot of media personnel do not consider themselves as the fourth estate. He added, the contribution of journalists like him towards reforming the electoral system is to publish and circulate the reports generated by organizations such as ADR. While concluding, he said, "media is not as free as it seems, in fact, it is helpless."

### **Questions and Answers**

**Q1. Prof Chhokar** asked the panel members about the possible ways in which the media or the fourth estate can contribute towards reforming the electoral system.

**Ans. Shri Manoj Mitta** said, *“As the other speakers on the panel have amply demonstrated that we (media) are encumbered by the fact that we are not really the fourth estate as much as we the part of an infotainment industry. We operate in an ecosystem where journalists cannot be as free as they should be for the health of the democracy.”* **Shri Ramakrishna Upadhy**a added, *“I do not think one should expect media to be a great institution which will find a solution. Media can only be a megaphone to the public opinion.”* He stressed on the fact that there is no mention of media under the section for freedom of speech in the Indian Constitution. Thus, beyond the projection of public opinions, media has no power. *“Media is neither a court nor an executive. It has no political powers. Journalists are just like other common people.”*



## Money Power and Elections – Success Stories from the Exceptions

### *Chairperson – Prof Trilochan Sastry*



**(From Left to Right)** Ms Ambamma (Sarpanch, Davaragudi Gram Panchayat, Karnataka), Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder & Trustee, ADR), Ms Agatha Bhengra (Mukhiya, Torpa, Jharkhand) and Ms Mallamma (Sarpanch, Raichur District Gram Panchayat, Karnataka)

#### **Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder and Trustee, ADR)**

Prof Trilochan Sastry introduced all the panel members. He then complimented all the panelists for having consistently won Gram Panchayat elections as women leaders, and also for campaigning without the aid of money or muscle power, with a minimal budget of Rs. 1000 to 2000 only.

#### **Ms Ambamma (Sarpanch, Davaragudi Gram Panchayat, Karnataka)**

Ms Ambamma began by sharing her story with the audience. For the past eight years, she had been a member of the Labour Union, and leader of the Davaragudi Gram Panchayat in Raichur district of Karnataka. As a leader of the local labour union, her main responsibility was to ensure employment for all villagers. During the Panchayat elections, other union members requested her to contest



and become their elected representative. She also pointed out that her rival candidate was the zamindar of that village, and he spent nearly Rs. 3 to 4 lakhs on election expenses.

She then shared the challenges faced by her during the elections. She stated that the zamindar first pressurized her to withdraw from the elections, and when that failed, he threatened her supporters that government facilities would be withheld if they continued supporting her, as a result of this threat they stopped attending her rallies.

Finally, after a few days, Ms Ambamma in turn confronted the villagers about their absence. They assured her that even though they were not attending her rallies, they would come through when it mattered most, the polling day. Though none of them attended the rallies, almost everyone ended up voting for her, and she managed to secure the largest number of votes in the history of their Gram Panchayat.

**Ms Mallamma (Sarpanch, Raichur District Gram Panchayat, Karnataka)**

Ms Mallamma introduced herself and then informed the audience about Mahila Okutta, with which she is associated. The Mahila Okutta works to ensure that all the government schemes reach citizens. Their organization was faced with the issue of having to approach the Panchayats every time requesting for funds, applying for various schemes, and so on. They then came up with the idea of having one of their own members contest the Gram Panchayat elections.



Therefore, they started holding committee meetings in villages, encouraging villagers to participate, discuss, and nominate a suitable candidate to contest Panchayat elections. Further, she said, their group decided that whether they won or lost, they would set a limit for election expenditures and stick to it. Collectively they then agreed upon a budget total budget of Rs. 1000 for the entire election campaign. Explaining the budget breakdown, she said that Rs. 500 rupees is required for the nomination process and obtaining caste certificates. Another Rs. 500, she said, is required for printing pamphlets. Thus, where candidates usually contest elections with budgets in excess of Rs. 10,000, their candidates contested elections with a budget of Rs. 1000 only.

Turning to the challenges they faced, she mentioned that the biggest issue for them, was that there are 8 categories (SC woman, SC man, ST woman, ST man, BC woman, BC man, General Category man and General Category woman), and they are declared just one month before the elections. Therefore, the hurdle is that even if the villagers have decided upon a candidate beforehand, there is doubt as to whether they are actually eligible to contest. Moreover, once the seat category is declared, one month is a very short window to hold meetings in all villages and decide upon their candidates.

On a positive note, she observed that previously they used to hold dharnas every 2 months in the Panchayats, whereas during the last 3 years, the number of times that people have been forced to protest has been reduced drastically. She further declared, that post elections, they have properly implemented Gram Sabhas. They have also come up with 5 year Village Development plans. Finally, she spoke about the liquor menace in Karnataka. She stated that throughout her tenure, every discussion began with women demanding a liquor ban in Karnataka. In 2016, all organizations of Karnataka collectively took up this issue. They organized a state level protest on the streets of Raichur, which was attended by more than 45,000 women. The expenditure for this mobilization came around Rs. 60 to 70 lakhs, which was crowdsourced by villagers themselves. This Andolan, she mentioned, has spread to many districts of Karnataka.



#### **Ms Agatha Bhengra (Mukhiya, Torpa, Jharkhand)**

Ms Agatha Bhengra began by stating she had just been recently elected for the second time as Mukhya of her panchayat. She then gave a brief bio, mentioning how she used to teach in a private school, in addition to being a leader of the Mahila Mandal. Initially, Ms Agatha said, she was not even aware of the roles and responsibilities of a village Mukhya, however on the advice of village elders; she decided to contest the elections. She received

considerable support from fellow villagers, who arranged for her transport, publishing of pamphlets etc. There were eight other candidates, who actively campaigned and held rallies, yet ultimately she won, due to recognition of her work in the Mahila Mandal, and active participation in Gram Sabhas.

Once she became the Mukhya, people started approaching her for issues like ration card, widows

pension etc. She used to assist them with filling forms, submitting their applications at the block level, and ensured that their issues were resolved. She revealed a disturbing incident, when upon completion of a waterbody project in her area, she was approached by Naxalites, attempting to extort money from her. They warned her that even if she approached the police for assistance, they would be back sooner or later, and the consequences would be dire. Bowing to these threats, she ended up collecting Rs. 15,000 from the villagers and paying off the Naxalites. She was apprehensive of contesting the elections a second time, but the villagers assured her of their support, come what may, and with that encouragement, she won for a second time.

In her second tenure, she had implemented various Government works, for instance villagers built 98 wells under the NREGA scheme, and were able to find gainful employment. She also mentioned that their Gram Panchayat has won two awards, one for implementing the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan effectively, and another for having a zero dropout rate in their village schools.

### Question and Answers

**Q1.** An audience member asked **Ms Mallamma**, “Was it difficult uniting people from different sections of society, getting them to work on common issues, and how she and her organization had achieved that?”

**Ans. Ms Mallamma** replied that there is no easy path laid out, their group had worked together for a long time, and it took 18 years for them to get where they are, and refine their internal process.

**Shri Nikhil Dey (Social Activist, MKSS)** shared his experiences, saying that it was difficult to win Panchayat elections, especially by abiding by the rule of using only Rs 1000 budget for election expenditure.” He added, however the role of a Sarpanch was extremely difficult, involving a lot of red tape and administrative issues. He believed Panchayati Raj needs a better support structure and more transparency in administration.



**Day – 2**

**(11<sup>th</sup> March'18)**

**Information & Communication Technology for Better Governance**

***Chairperson: Dr Vipul Mudgal***



***(From Left to Right) Ms Deepti Bharthur (Senior Research Associate, IT for Change),  
Ms Manasa Venkataraman (Research Associate, Takshashila Institution),  
Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee, ADR), Shri Jaskirat Singh (Trustee – ADR, Founder – CRAMAT),  
Shri Vinay K Sreenivasa (Alternative Law Forum),***

**Chairperson: Dr Vipul Mudgal (Trustee, ADR)**

Dr Vipul Mudgal began the session by stating that the future course of media is being dictated by Information and Communication Technologies, so much so, that ICT has subsumed media in its fold. He then introduced all panel members, and looked forward to hearing their views on using ICT to bridge the digital divide.







**Shri Vinay K Sreenivasa (Alternative Law Forum)**

Shri Vinay K Sreenivasa began by saying we needed to focus on the problems created by ICT as far as elections are concerned, and then work on solutions from the realm of ICT to solve digital issues. For instance, he added, a problem that has come up lately worldwide, is that of fake news. This problem has been enabled by technology, through channels of social media, such as Facebook or WhatsApp. He went on to say that there is no proper legal definition of fake news. Despite recommendations by the

Law Commission and Press Council, paid news has not been included in the Representation of People Act as an offence.

He stated that posters, banners and other traditional media can be monitored via the model code of conduct, but it is difficult to do any monitoring when individual voters are being targeted through social media. This is problematic because political parties can act through third party agents, and moreover, due to disclosure and privacy laws, it is difficult to track such engagements. Supervising social media is thus a major issue.

**Finally, he outlined a few solutions for above problems:**

1. There should be a formal legal recognition or definition of the terms hate speech and fake news. Currently, fake news is used to attack someone anonymously, or promote someone using fraudulent means.
2. The Law Commission in its recommendation had said that paid news should be registered as a new offence in sections 123 and 125, and a new sub-section should be made to ensure that paid news is defined as a corrupt practice. The same should be done with fake news and hate speech.
3. Election Commission of India's media handbook is outdated, it should be updated, taking into account a candidate's expenditure on social media, and use of fake news or hate speech.
4. Election Commission also has media certification and monitoring committees, these committees could be used to monitor fake news.

5. The Election Commission could collaborate with fact-checking websites such as Alt news and FactChecker or have an in-house mechanism to verify and bust fake news.

He concluded by saying that it has become imperative to look into the role of ICT in democracy, as it is crucial for having free and fair elections in the future.

**Shri Jaskirat Singh (Trustee, ADR, Founder, CRAMAT)**

Shri Jaskirat Singh began by sharing ADR's work, and his experiences in the 10 years he has been associated with ADR. He spoke about how ADR's work can strengthen democracy leading to better governance.

**He stated that ADR is trying to improve democracy at different levels by:**

1. Educating voters to make them vote for better candidates.
2. Encouraging political parties to give tickets to clean candidates, and not be swayed by money. ADR has also been speaking in favour of inner party democracy to bring more transparency in political parties.
3. Improving democracy through the judiciary, ADR is taking the legal path by filing PILs.
4. Using media as a medium for voter education, by making politician's data available in the public domain.
5. ADR also seeks help from institutions like the ECI and CIC.



Discussing the role of IT, he stated that ADR has always used it as a key tool. For instance, during the Nirbhaya rape case, ADR released a report on MPs and MLAs with cases of crimes against women. This report was quoted widely by media houses, and used in the Justice Verma Commission Report.

The message that went out, was that politicians accused of crimes against women themselves, could not be expected to legislate on such issues. ADR could provide this data quickly, due to access to a huge database as well as in-house software, and this report was widely shared because of ADR's credibility and integrity.

Data is very important part of all the reports and data comes from IT.

To sum up he said data forms a crucial part of IT. Leveraging this data can be a powerful tool for activism. This in turn can lead to better governance.

**Ms Manasa Venkataramanan (Lawyer and Research Associate, Takshashila Institution)**



Ms Manasa Venkataramanan began by observing that there are four basic facets to governance – access, transparency, accountability and efficiency in provision of services and goods. Improving these four aspects, she argued, is most easily done through ICT, as we already live in a data reliant world. As technology progresses at an exponential pace, and the law moves forward at a linear pace, she felt technology would always be able to keep up.

In order to channel ICT for better governance, she stated that the first step there is an information asymmetry problem between all stakeholders which needs to be addressed. This leads to problems in accountability and transparency. She felt that the Supreme Court’s judgement in the Justice Puttaswamy petition was most timely, and laws needed to be retroactively amended to protect the privacy of internet users. Adding to Shri Vinay Sreenivasa’s views on fake news and hate speech, she said that this was an accountability issue as well, as she did not know who to hold accountable.

Further, we need to constitute a dedicated regulatory authority to deal with the Government’s usage of data. As it was not possible to predict how ICT was going to evolve in the future, she believed that our governance system should be improved on the basis of a few fundamental principles. And that, she concluded, was the most efficient way forward for better governance.

**Ms Deepti Bharthur (Senior Research Associate, IT for Change)**



Ms Deepti Bharthur started by saying that while technology has limitless possibilities, it also has equal potential for good and for bad. She observed how big data and technology had affected political campaigning, and politicians did not need to do door-to-door canvassing any longer, or even have a physical space to function from, and cited Barack Obama’s 2012 election campaign and the 2017 Assembly Elections in Uttar Pradesh as examples. However, she cautioned that we are also

seeing a lot of Internet ‘pollution’, with fake news being propagated, and social media users being targeted and polarized, giving the 2012 Mexico Elections as an example, where hashtags were relentlessly pushed by Twitter ‘bots’. Consequently, she questioned the value of the content, which was being pushed on social media platforms, with 90% of it being junk content.

She observed a worrying new trend, which was the power of big data to affect election outcomes. Political gerrymandering, she observed, had become easier with technology, with electoral candidates manipulating elections so that, even if they did not win, at least their opponent would lose. She questioned if using ICT to manipulate voter perceptions was strictly legal, and encouraging a healthy Democracy or not. She felt we are turning into a digital wasteland, with increasing polarization, and users becoming ‘echo chambers’, by sharing the same content repeatedly with the same groups of followers, and not really participating in any healthy debate.

On the other hand, she also gave forth some examples of ICT being used for good, for instance in Spain, where citizens are being included in local government through digital platforms. Citizens can put forth proposals for their local councils on a website, which is then opened up for debate, and close to 40-50 sessions, both online and offline, with citizens finally taking a vote on the project, which affects the council’s final decision.

She also spoke about Singapore’s Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning, a strategic risk assessment and analysis tool, which aims to provide early alerts on potential threats to national security by developing a network that links various independent government agencies. The aim for RAHS is to help leaders to anticipate future security threats and patterns through a networked government approach. This model has given excellent results for all government departments, and is one of the most comprehensive data models in the world.

She concluded on a cautionary note, stating that the arc of innovation would always be longer than the arc of policy, with policy forever playing ‘catch-up’. Elected representatives, she felt, needed to be cautious about accountability, when they themselves had become bound to technology.

### Question and Answer

**Q1. Dr Vipul Mudgal** posed the first question to **Shri Vinay Sreenivasa**, citing fact checking websites like Altnews and Hoaxslayer, and questioned first whether the Election Commission’s Media Monitoring Committees were up to the task of checking for fake news on social media, and second, whether an app or any other tool to identify fake news could be developed for this purpose?

**Ans. Shri Vinay Sreenivasa** concurred with Dr Mudgal saying the capacity of Media Monitoring Committees to check fake news was doubtful. He agreed an app could be helpful; however he felt that apps could be manipulated as well. He believed that in the long run, we need to strengthen and improve institutions like the media monitoring committees, and further, legislation should be brought in to penalize purveyors of fake news.

**Q2. Dr Vipul Mudgal** then turned to the topic of citizens intervention, and asked **Shri Jaskirat Singh** which were the best means, app or otherwise, to encourage citizen participation and intervention in the political process?

**Ans. Shri Jaskirat Singh** replied to the question, and gave the example of the Election Watch Reporter (EWR) App, which citizens can use for reporting violations of Electoral Law or over expenditure by candidates during their election campaigns. He had developed a similar app, which could be used to improve local governance, wherein citizens could complain about civic issues, such as garbage or potholes in roads, and a photograph of the issue, along with time and geo stamps would be sent to the relevant authorities, based on a map of the city. He felt that while these apps do provide a platform for citizens to engage with decision makers, technology was just a tool, and ultimately people are the ones who have to use it.

**Q3. Dr Vipul Mudgal** then queried **Ms Manasa Venkataramanan** specifically on data protection, with citizens increasingly being surrounded by large quantities of data, how an average person should protect themselves?

**Ans. Ms Manasa** agreed that there was an urgent need for data protection laws, due to a data asymmetry. She felt that governments need to be more accountable, and should be accountable to their citizens, just as a company is accountable to its clients. She also felt there was a requirement for an independent body to conduct regular audits, and ensure greater symmetry.

**Q4. Dr Mudgal** then asked **Ms Deepti Bharthur** about game theory, and how public perceptions are being affected by gaming, through the use of algorithms?

**Ans. Ms Deepti Bharthur** replied that contrary to public perception, the Internet is not a level playing field. Those with money and power, can afford better servers, write better algorithms, recruit teams of thousands of people working for them and relentlessly pushing hashtags, and then taking over the social media landscape.



**Dr Vipul Mudgal** then urged ADR and Karnataka Election Watch to join hands with other stakeholders, hold workshops regularly to discuss the role of ICT in democracy and how advocacy could help this cause. He then thanked all panelists for their participation, before concluding the session.

## Role of Youth & Voter Awareness: Advocacy by State Coordinators

***Chairperson: Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.)***



***(From Left to Right)*** Ms Pankti Jog (Gujarat Election Watch), Dr O P Bhuraita (Himachal Pradesh Election Watch), Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head of ADR), Shri Ranjan Mohanty (Odisha Election Watch) and Shri Sanjay Singh (Uttar Pradesh Election Watch)]

### **Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head of ADR)**

Maj Gen Anil Verma began by requesting the coordinators of Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, Dr O P Bhuraita and Ms Pankti to narrate their experience in conducting Election Watch campaigns in their respective states in addition to focusing on the topic of discussion. He stated that there was a need for a little rethinking and focus on certain other aspects of voter awareness campaigns. After discussions with the State Partners, and amongst members of ADR, he felt that it would be good if we could start focusing on the youth, meaning students in school (XI & XII class students) as well as college students.



He stated that it was also important to make the youth understand how governance may be improved with their active participation, and why it was essential that they do not get involved in the politics of caste, creed and religion. He felt that if this message was understood by even 40-50% of our target group, it would make a big difference.

Introducing “Hum badenge apna Bharat” campaign of ADR, which was being conducted in Delhi in a few schools and evoked good response from children who asked questions and were eager to learn. The other youth awareness campaign mentioned was the “Campus Ambassador” program launched with one preliminary meeting in Delhi in which students from all over the country had come displaying their enthusiasm to be a part of ADR and its activities. Continuing, he stated that the idea behind this program was to have a group of 2 – 3 students who in turn would conduct activities in the college after consultation with ADR. He concluded by stating that ADR was hopeful that this campaign would develop into a good movement with the help of state partners as ADR would ideally like to have similar programs in all states.

He also appreciated the efforts of partners already interacting with and taking the help of NSS and NCC cadets in conducting various voter awareness programs in their respective states.



### **Shri Sanjay Singh (Uttar Pradesh Election Watch)**

Shri Sanjay Singh began by stating that during the recently concluded local body elections, his team had conducted various awareness campaigns targeting young voters and had seen very good results. He stated that UP EW had active teams in 40 districts of the state where the District Election Watch members planned and conducted various voter awareness programs. Apart from focusing on educating the voters on decriminalization of politics and money power in elections,

UP EW also conducted various programs to discuss these issues with other like-minded civil society organizations.

Based on the experience of conducting campaigns, Shri Sanjay Singh said that the UPEW have arrived at three main observations: a) conduct programs by collaborating with various degree colleges and Universities on specific issues like “Democracy and Youth” etc., which helps in increasing student participation in regular outreach programs; b) network with civil society organisations such as teachers’

associations, *Aanganwadi* workers' association, labour union, etc. for better outreach; c) focus on the main mission of ADR, which is to work towards cleaner governance by weeding out money and muscle power in politics.

UP EW conducted voter awareness campaign for the first time for local body elections wherein Lucknow and its nearby districts were chosen for the intense campaign due to limited time and resources. He said that it was important to note that all 110 wards of Lucknow District were covered as part of the campaign with the help of 30 volunteers. Ward-level Election Watch committees were set up for conducting programs over a period of two months, which saw immediate and positive effects in terms of increasing awareness of the voters with respect to good governance and how to bring about a change in the system.

Among various activities planned, there were *padhyatras*, rallies, *nukkad-natak*, wall-paintings, *chaupal*, dialogues with women and the youth on their issues and grievances, active engagement with the media and civil societies, etc. He said that the success of UPEW in reaching out to people prompted other like-minded people to also engage in similar activities with good results. According to Shri Sanjay Singh, one of the main target groups was the youth of the districts and observing their understanding of the nuances of the election process and their expectations from the elected representatives helped UP EW in refining their voter awareness campaigns. Due to such active engagements, he felt, "... *public understood our cause and supported our activities by regularly sharing details with respect to distribution of food packets, footballs (candidate's allocated election symbol), etc.*" He said that rallies were held in such pockets where money power to lure voters was seen before elections, which led to decisive action taken by SEC in controlling rampant voter appeasement. This, according to him, was a great boost to the volunteers of UP EW and participants, alike.

Shri Sanjay Singh observed that through various awareness campaigns, 'bad practices' of money distribution and intimidation of voters had reduced considerably and candidates with good background have had the chance to win elections. Through this low cost and effective campaign, he felt that the team was able to educate the voters about the ills of liquor distribution which also led to UP EW conducting a small case study. Talking about the case study in Talbehat Nagar Panchayat, he spoke about the candidate who spent more than Rs 1 cr ahead of elections as opposed to a female candidate who spent a few lakhs rupees but won the elections for the third time as an independent candidate. He threw light on the fact that the female candidate won without distribution of liquor or money. The case

study conducted by UP EW on her candidature and victory showed that with good intentions, she was able to convert Talbehat into a model town.

Going forward, for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Shri Sanjay Singh updated the audience with the plans of UP EW which was to focus intensely on 40 out of 80 Parliamentary Constituencies, which have 18 divisional offices each. By targeting 2 constituencies in each divisional office, especially in Banaras, Jhansi, Lucknow and Amethi, he stated that it would be a focused campaign. He also added that the team was planning to collaborate with civil societies and prepare a 'Demand Charter', initial preparations for which is already underway. He stated that the model being currently followed in Kolaras and Mungaoli of Madhya Pradesh to reduce money and muscle power along with better voter turnout would be replicated in the districts targeted by UP EW. He also confirmed that regular methods of voter awareness campaigns would also be followed with small changes to improve their effectiveness. He concluded by stating that NCC and NSS cadets would be roped in for improved youth participation.



#### **Shri Ranjan Mohanty (Odisha Election Watch)**

Shri Ranjan Mohanty began by stating that youth of under 35 years of age formed around 65% of the population, 70% of which were eligible to vote. Thus, he felt that it was very important to find the most effective ways to target such youth population. Based on previous experience of his organization PECUC and Odisha Election Watch (OEW), he found that most of the youth stayed away from casting their votes due to many reasons, one of which is, unfortunately, was

the negative view towards the entire election process and governance with regard to lack of job opportunities and better standards of living. He observed that this tendency of distrust and lack of enthusiasm had developed among the young voters.

Talking about the survey held a decade back and conducted by PECUC, Shri Mohanty said that the results showed that even post-graduate students were not aware of what the Constitution held. This, he felt, was a troubling scenario, where the voters were not willing or enthusiastic enough to learn more about the basic laws of our land. For that reason, he stated that ADR and Odisha Election Watch (OEW) have been trying to push a larger population of the youth into various campaigns, which started from 2002-2003 when OEW was born and improved in a more focused way since 2012-13. He



elaborated by stating that three main groups were formed, one of which was that of people who were 18+, eligible to vote and enrolled in the voters' list. The other group contained people, who were 18+, eligible to vote but are not enrolled to vote. The third group contained those who would be shortly eligible to vote (age group of 16/ 17 years). In 2013, it was decided to focus on these three types of groups and begin working with them. Offices of the CEO and NSS were also actively involved ahead of the Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly Elections held in 2014. Office of the CEO called a meeting of the NSS, representatives from Universities and Higher Secondary Council, scout guides and Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) apart from representatives from the media and civil society organisations.

While working with NSS, Shri Mohanty stated that OEW focused on different aspects of voter awareness campaigns, one of which was organizing quiz competitions. These competitions were organized throughout the state in collaboration with the office of the CEO wherein quiz questions were prepared by OEW at the district level and NSS came into picture when conducting these events at college level, winners of which competed at the district level, jointly organized by OEW, NSS and Office of the CEO. Winners from each district finally competed at the state level, which was organized by OEW. He continued by saying, *"Organizing Panchayat level voter awareness campaigns for the local body elections was another way of engaging youth in our outreach programs. 'My Vote, My Village' was the tagline of the campaign organized at the Panchayat level with a push towards ethical voting."* At the institutional level, youth were actively involved by organizing meetings and holding a signature-cum-oath campaign for the youth wherein they took a pledge to not sell their votes and vote for honest and clean candidates.

Talking about the recently conducted marathon with the tag-line of 'Run for Democracy' on National Voters' Day (25<sup>th</sup> January, 2018), he said that young people representing various institutions and NSS cadets actively took part which helped spread more awareness to the general public and cultivating enthusiasm about elections and governance in the young minds. As a suggestion, Shri Mohanty said, *"Actively engaging and working with young women is one of the ideas that can be taken forward and replicated elsewhere"*. Elaborating the point, he stated that OEW frequently conducts two types of campaigns by engaging with women: a) apart from providing life-skills training, OEW also educates them regarding the Constitution and the election processes; b) female NSS cadets were engaged in organizing and conducting election watch campaigns.



While one way to engage youth was by visiting them in institutions and engaging with them in their terrain, Shri Mohanty was of the opinion that it was important to look into ways to improve their engagement by encouraging the institutions to collaborate with various activities on voter awareness. This, he felt, ensured sustained participation of the youth and would be one of the key areas of focus of OEW during Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly elections, to be held in 2019.

Appreciating the 'Hum Badenge Apna Bharat' campaign of ADR, he said that it was one of the other focus area of OEW as it helps mould the young minds in being aware of their responsibilities towards their country apart from being a cost effective way of reaching out to them. He said that an initial discussion with the Higher Secondary Council has already been held by OEW and that they have shown much interest in conducting these programs in the campus of various schools. OEW was also thinking of conducting these workshops at the college level with active involvement of NSS cadets where NSS Program Officers would be given training to conduct such events in the college level.

Thus, he concluded, *"... educating youth in Constitution, elections and the democratic set up has always been a part of voter awareness campaign of OEW. It is not only educating the youth but also ensuring their participation in the electoral process that will determine the success of these campaigns."* Talking about his plans in the run up to the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, he said that OEW had already started the ground work wherein efforts were underway to re-constitute the district level Election Watch committees each of which will have members not only from various like-minded NGOs but also from the media, academia, concerned senior citizens, retired bureaucrats, etc. who would be involved in the planning and conduct of various election watch campaigns. OEW has also planned new activities to capture the attention of the public and push them to take action with respect to the electoral process. He said, *"One of the activities will involve visiting villages from Malkangiri to Jaleswar which involves meeting villagers and educating them on the importance of voting and for the right candidate."*

One of the other planned activities, he continued, was sensitization of the media. Despite media actively taking up issues related to electoral and political reforms that OEW and ADR circulate, he was of the opinion that a few media houses including TV channels, unethically, asked voters, who they voted for. Such programs or write ups during elections, he felt, was an unethical process which would be highlighted as part of the media workshop. Conducting focused campaigns at the educational levels, creating a people's manifesto, organizing meetings with CEO and DEOs, sensitization of the media and

people at the village level, etc. were a few of the various activities planned for Lok Sabha campaign, said Shri Ranjan Mohanty, concluding his speech.



**Ms Pankti Jog (Gujarat Election Watch)**

Ms Pankti Jog primarily discussed the activities taken up by the Gujarat Election Watch (GEW) for voter awareness and role of the youth in these activities. The GEW adopted a focused approach by being specific in terms of the geographical area covered and targeted beneficiaries of the campaign activities. The rationale behind the selective outreach program was to reach the unreachable. The GEW concentrated on the constituencies, which she believed, are commonly left out by the other major campaigns. Moreover, in these constituencies, the GEW aimed to reach the nomadic people who remain deprived of the benefits of such voter awareness campaigns.

While talking about the GEW activities, she mentioned that 'Jansamvaad' (community meetings) remained one of the most successful activities. The GEW's jansamvaad were organized in the deep tribal area of Gujarat, where people came forward to discuss their problems. She said that in one of the meetings, not only VVPAT's demo was provided, but also its drawbacks were discussed. On the issue of youth and voter awareness, she informed the audience that instead of being enrolled at schools and universities, the majority of the youth in these constituencies are working as laborers at factories, as salt workers or are unemployed. She said that through jansamvaad, the GEW was able to reach to youth both at schools and universities, and to the youth employed in the factories etc. These jansamvaad resulted in the transforming some of these young people into citizen volunteers who further contributed in making the voter awareness campaigns a success.

She said that some of these young citizen volunteers for the voter awareness campaigns assisted people to go out and vote where the polling booth was 30-45 km away from their residence. Further, there has been a vital contribution of youth in the Gujarat politics. She said, *"There are 12% of MLAs who are under the age of 40 years. They are more approachable and open to a dialogue regarding the issues in their constituencies."* While concluding she said that for a favorable outcome, there is a need for a sustained dialogue with the youth, not only around the elections but also throughout the year.



### **Dr O P Bhuraita (Himachal Pradesh Election Watch)**

Dr O P Bhuraita began by stating that the Himachal Pradesh Election Watch (HPEW) campaign worked on the similar theme as that of GEW, i.e. 'reaching the unreachable'. HPEW adopted focused campaign in the interior parts of Shimla, Chamba, Mandi, and Sirmour where the voter turnout in 2012 assembly elections was low. He said that the HPEW campaign focused primarily on women and youth. It focused on the youth of age 18-24 years, especially those who have

not yet registered for a voter card.

It addressed the meetings of groups such as Mahila Mandal, Aanganwadi, and other self-help groups, to spread the voter awareness among people. Jansamvaad, nukkad natak and press conferences were some of the activities taken up by the HPEW to generate voter awareness. He stated that through these activities, HPEW was able to reach up to one lakh people. Further, he emphasized the significance of ICT tools in such campaigns. He said that besides, activities like jansamvaad, HPEW used WhatsApp as a medium to circulate information regarding the electoral system and motivate people to vote. Moreover, through WhatsApp, they have been able to create an ever-growing network of young volunteers, who circulate information pertaining to voter awareness. In the end, he listed out major learnings from the HPEW campaign.

First and foremost, it is imperative to increase the youth participation in the campaign. He stressed on creating more youth-centric programs through mediums such as WhatsApp and Jansamvaad. Secondly, he said that there is a need to maintain the continuity of the voter awareness campaigns. Such campaigns should not be subjected to a limited time frame but must continue throughout the year. Finally, he said that HPEW will prepare the people's agenda for 2019 Lok Sabha Elections and will present this agenda to the candidates and ensure that people will only vote for the candidate who will fulfill their demands.

## Strategy Workshop – National Election Watch Partners’ Meeting

Date and Venue: 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2018

Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bangalore

### AGENDA

Time	Session
14:30 – 14:45	<b>Welcome address and Background to the Meeting</b> Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.)
14:45 – 15:00	<b>Presentation on ‘Making Democracy Work’ campaigns</b> Dr Balasubramanian Sivakumar (Vivekanand Youth Movement)
15:00 – 15:45	<b>Strategy Building – Preparation for Lok Sabha elections, 2019</b> <b>Group discussion – region-wise:</b>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad activities envisioned <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Target groups</li> <li>Communication &amp; Outreach methods</li> <li>Research &amp; Advocacy to be undertaken</li> <li>Network and alliance partners</li> </ol> </li> <li>Resources required (human, knowledge, skill, technology, finance etc.)</li> <li>Ideas on how the resources can be enhanced (including generating them locally)</li> </ol> <b>Group I</b> (Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh) <b>Group II</b> (West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh) <b>Group III</b> (J&K, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand) <b>Group IV</b> (Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan) <b>Group V</b> (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana, Puducherry)
15:45 – 16:00	<b>Tea Break</b>
16:00 – 16:45	<b>Presentation by all Groups</b>
16:45 – 17:00	<b>Future Plans and Way Forward</b> Prof. Trilochan Sastry
17:00 – 18:30	<b>Electoral Reforms &amp; Social Media – Workshop cum Training</b> Google
18:30 – 19:00	Q and A followed by Tea

## Welcome address and Background to the meeting

***Chairperson- Maj. Gen. Anil Verma (Retd.) (Head of ADR)***

**Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) (Head, ADR)**



Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd) welcomed all the State Partners who came from all across the country to attend the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference in Bangalore. He said that one of the reasons to organize the National Conference in Bangalore was that Karnataka State Assembly was going to polls in 2018. He thanked Prof Trilochan Sastry, Shri Harish Narasappa and Dr Balasubramanian Sivakumar for helping in organizing the big event at IIM Bangalore.

Gen Verma briefed the audience about the format of the meeting, saying that after Dr Balasubramanian's presentation, all the State Partners would be divided into five groups. He said, the groups are required to discuss and debate their ideas and plans about the grass-root level voter awareness campaigns in their respective states ahead of the Lok Sabha 2019 elections. The discussion should be focused on these issues -- identifying target groups, communication & outreach methods, research & advocacy to be undertaken, network and alliance partners, resources required (human, knowledge, skill, technology, finance etc.) and ideas on how the resources can be enhanced (including generating them locally).

### **Presentation on 'Making Democracy Work' campaigns**

**Dr Balasubramanian Sivakumar (Vivekananda Youth Movement)**



Dr Balasubramanian Sivakumar informed about their 'Making Democracy Work' campaigns, which Vivekananda Youth Movement (VYM) ran ahead of 2013 Karnataka State Assembly elections and 2014 Lok Sabha elections. He said that both the campaigns were concentrated in the Mysore district only, especially in the rural areas, and led to an increase in the voting percentage of the district by 8%. He said that in urban areas, their focus was on encouraging eligible citizens to vote in elections, whereas in rural area, the aim was to

educate citizens to not just vote but vote responsibly and select those candidates who could answer their questions.

Describing the campaign's methodology, Dr Balasubramanian said, as part of the campaign, they got involved in all aspects of electioneering, right from the systematic writing of manifestos, for which VYM



had interactions with all the Political Parties and Manifesto Committees, to the common man questioning Politicians. He said, they had a 14 points questionnaire for the candidates contesting elections and they were required to answer all these questions. Prajawani, which had tied up with VYM for the campaign, published all the questions as well as answers of all the candidates contesting elections from that district to help people choose the right candidate.

Dr Balasubramanian said that with 2018 Karnataka Assembly elections, they are expanding their campaign and will work in three districts of Karnataka - Mysore, Hassan and Kodagu. In all the three districts, the focus will be on getting the citizens to engage in the politics to ensure free and fair elections. The sole aim is to educate people not to sell their vote in the upcoming elections because as per the information, 2018 Karnataka elections will be the most expensive elections so far. It is rumoured that candidates are pumping in crores of rupees to buy people's vote. He informed that VYM does three major activities – first, engage with media and they also have their own community radio with huge reach, second, organizing public programmes and third, working on election manifestos.

## Presentation by Groups

### Group V (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh & Telangana, Puducherry)



1. The focus of Group V was to organize voter awareness campaigns for clean and fair elections with special emphasis on importance of NOTA.
2. They are planning to target rural people, women, first time voters, candidates, sitting Parliamentarians and political parties.
3. Their outreach methods would include Social Media and one on one communications through trained volunteers. These volunteers would further train community leaders to educate the voters as they would understand the problem of the community better.

4. They also suggested that ADR should provide its research and reports to local NGOs who would translate these reports in the local languages to spread awareness among the local voters and facilitators.
5. They also suggested creation of one-minute videos on ADR reports and issues for greater dissemination.
6. They also suggested networking and alliances with local NGOs for the voter awareness purpose.

#### **Group IV (Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan)**



1. The Group IV suggested that they are planning to question the governments of their States on the basis of their manifestos and what promises they have fulfilled.
2. The Rajasthan EW has plans to identify 11 big issues that the ruling party has not fulfilled and organize state-level meetings for the public audit of the ruling party's manifesto.
3. They have also suggested organizing workshops and seminars for academicians, media persons and new age youth to encourage them to vote wisely.
4. MPEW suggested organizing Youth Ambassadors programme in their states. This would be akin to ADR's Campus Ambassadors Programme, to organize different events and programmes in the colleges of their states on issues like 'increasing criminalization of politics,' 'huge election expenditure' and 'opaqueness in the financial dealings of political parties', 'lack of inner-party democracy in political parties', and 'importance of informed and ethical voting'.

**Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.)** Selection of ambassadors should be done only after interviews by ADR representatives. Secondly, ADR will sponsor and monitor all these programs.

**Group III (J&K, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand)**



1. The priority of Group III was to reach out to the youth by organizing workshops and seminars in colleges and universities. They suggested the use of Social Media on a greater scale, including whatsapp, to reach out to the 133 million first time voters during Lok Sabha 2019 elections.
2. They also suggested creation of a new app for the collection of feedback about existing MPs and MLAs. This would help enhancing the accountability of the legislators.
3. They said there should be greater dissemination of the data on the performance of legislators. The group proposed use of folk themes like folk artists, folk music in creating voter awareness among the people.
4. Target Groups should include not only voters but also candidates, parliamentarians and political parties. As social media is already being used for communication and outreach, apart from that, there should be one-on-one communication through volunteers. Instead of a group trying to reach out to an entire population or a segment, selected volunteers should train community leaders for voter awareness purposes in their communities.

**Maj Gen Anil Verma (Retd.)**

He mentioned ADR's plan to have regional consultations on electoral and political reforms in four cardinal directions - North, East, West and South. He requested the state partners to confirm the location, dates and topics to be covered.



**Group II (West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh) &  
Group I (Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh)**



1. Odisha team has made tremendous progress in their voter awareness program, by organising **"Run for Democracy"**, which is a marathon and it's a very visible form of raising awareness among voters, it involved greater participation from the people.
2. They intend to have meetings with all kinds of stakeholders and political leaders so that they can raise voter issues and create voter awareness at different level. Odisha team intends to do a **Rath Yatra** covering all the districts as part of voter awareness campaign, where it will be aligned with the cultural ethos of the state.
3. They are using NSS cadets for creating voter awareness and intend to target 100 colleges as part of HBAB program.
4. WBEW suggested engagement with the political leaders, multi-stakeholders and discussions on pertinent issues which are important in the context of electoral reforms for example proportional representation, NOTA etc.
5. Organize debates among the school students and college students on electoral democracy.
6. Manifesto analysis of all the political parties and creation of a check-list so that an audit can be done to ascertain what they have promised and what they have delivered.

7. BEW team said that inner-party democracy, which is lacking in the political parties, is an issue which should be propagated with greater force besides banning of people with criminal cases from contesting elections.

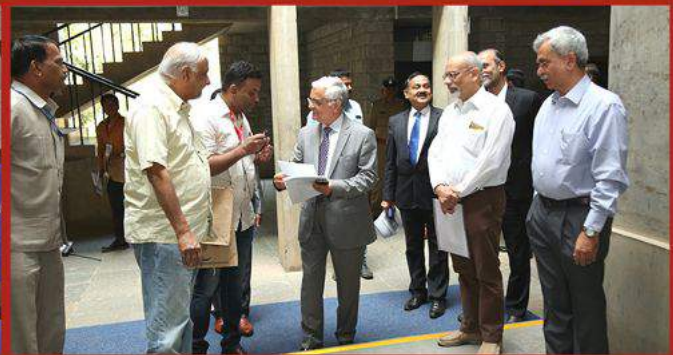
## **The Way Forward**

### **Prof Trilochan Sastry (Founder Trustee, ADR)**

At the end of the two-day event, Prof Trilochan Sastry expressed his gratitude to all the participants for their time and commitment towards the cause of ADR. He said that the Annual National Conference gives us an opportunity to interact with each other and share our experiences. It is a platform where different State Partners update others about their grass-root level voter awareness activities organized in their respective states. It also helps in discussing ideas for future activities and preparing a roadmap. In the coming year till April 2019, nine states and the Lok Sabha elections would be held. He urged all the State Partners to strategise as to how to motivate the common man to shun bribes and elect good candidates.



## Photo Gallery









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